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IV

THE PARISH CLERK, AND HIS RIGHT TO READ THE LITURGICAL EPISTLE, BY CUTHBERT ATCHLEY, L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S.

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK & BOMBAY
1903

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PREFACE.

The purpose of the following pages is to vindicate the right of the parish clerks to read the Liturgical Epistle. In most churches in England the office of parish clerk is put into commission, and there are several men who in turn execute the duties thereto pertaining. There is, needless to say, no intention of advocating the revival of the illiterate, careless, and often irreverent person of whom one hears from one's forbears: he was a morbid degeneration from a healthy organ of the body ecclesiastical. The clerk of the canons and visitation articles is quite another person: he is literate, musical, and able to teach the young. The last qualification is seldom a *sine qua non* in these days: but it hardly ever happens that a priest cannot obtain one or more young men who can read distinctly and intelligibly, and who are completely baptised, to serve at the altar. It is this sort of persons which the following paper has in view. One cannot insist too strongly that, from an historical point of view, there is nothing more sacerdotal in the right of reading the liturgical Epistle than in that of reading the first or second lesson at Evensong and Matins.

Where, in the following pages, it has been desired to indicate the liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer, the term *Eucharist* has been used, leaving the word *Mass* to denote the liturgy in the Latin language. This difference of terminology was made from motives of convenience only, not because the writer regarded the two liturgies as otherwise than substantially identical.

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THE PARISH CLERK, AND HIS RIGHT TO READ THE LITURGICAL EPISTLE, BY CUTHBERT ATCHLEY, L.R.C.P., M.R.C.S.

THE Homilies, we are told upon good authority, contain a godly and wholesome doctrine, necessary for the time of Queen Elizabeth. In searching through them for some specimen of this, we shall come upon this passage in the *First Part of the Sermon concerning the Sacrament*, which seems to respond fully to the statement of the 35th Article of Religion, and which, moreover, is as necessary for the year 1903 as for the year 1571 :—

> But, before all other things, this we must be sure of specially, that this Supper be in such wise done and ministered, as our Lord and Saviour did, and commanded to be done, as his holy apostles used it, and the good fathers in the primitive church frequented it.

What was the practice of "the good fathers in the primitive church" with regard to the reading of the Epistle? and first, what was "the Primitive Church"? In the *First Part of the Sermon on Fasting*, the Council of Chalcedon, one of the four first general Councils, is brought forward to teach "how fasting was used in the primitive church," which brings us up to A.D. 451; and in the Act of Supremacy (1 Eliz., cap i.), we find that Scripture and the four first general Councils are the standards by which heresy is to be judged. And

a careful perusal of the rest of the Homilies leads to the same conclusion: though Jewel was willing[1] to extend the period called the "Primitive Church" to "the space of six hundred years after Christ."

The earliest account of a celebration of the Holy Eucharist after the apostolic times is given us by Justin Martyr in the 67th chapter of his first Apology. The passage referring to the matter now before us runs as follows:—

> Now on the day called Sunday all who dwell in cities or in the country come together to the same place, and the reminiscences of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as there is time. When the reader has ceased, the president instructs by word of mouth, and calls on them to imitate these good things.

We do not learn much about the Reader from this. The words Τοῦ Ἀναγινώσκοντος simply mean, *The one who reads*, telling us nothing of his position in the ecclesiastical economy.

St. Cyprian, who was Bishop of Carthage from 248 to 258, tells his clergy in his 33rd Epistle about one "Aurelius, an illustrious youth, tender in years," who "merited a higher degree of clerical ordination, estimated (as he ought to be) not after his years but his deserts." The saint then goes on to say—

> But for the present I thought it right that he should begin with the office of Reader. For nothing is more fitting for that voice, which has confessed the Lord with

[1] In a sermon preached at Paul's Cross, the second Sunday before Easter, 1560, reprinted in his *Works*, Parker Society, 1844; i., 20. *The Second Part of the Sermon against Peril of Idolatry* speaks in its 18th paragraph of "six councils which were allowed and received of all men."

> a glorious witness, than to be heard in the solemn reading of the divine word: than after splendid words which bore witness to Christ, to read the Gospel of Christ whence his witnesses are made; than after the rack to come to the reading-desk.

And further on he tells them that Aurelius was ordained by himself and his fellow bishops. In his 34th Epistle he announces the promotion of one Celerinus, to the same order. After his noble confession, he says:—

> What else was to be done but that he should be set in the reading-desk . . . that . . . he may read the commandments and the Gospel of the Lord, which he so courageously and faithfully follows.

In the Apostolic Constitutions (Lib. viii: cap. 22) the ordination of a Reader is directed to be effected with laying on of hands and invocation of the Holy Ghost.

In the liturgy found in the writings of pseudo-Dionysius the mass-lessons are appointed to be read by Λειτούργοι, a term which includes both deacons and subdeacons.[1] This is assigned to the Syrian rite, or perhaps to an outlying type intermediate between the Syrian and the Persian, and is dated *circa* 500 A.D.

In the seventh century, as we learn from the Epistle of Isidore to Ludifred,[2] in the Gallican Church it pertained to the deacon to read the lessons from the New Testament, the Epistle and Gospel; and to the Reader only those from the Old. But in Spain, at any rate,

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[1] F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies, Eastern and Western*, Oxford, 1896; i. 487, 490.

[2] Gratian, *Decreti* pars I: distinct. xxv: cap. i, *Perlectis.*

it would appear from the Council held at Toledo in the year 400, that then both the Old and New Testament lessons were read by clerks of lower degree than deacons, though it does not seem quite certain of what rank they were. The fourth canon of this Council ordains that a digamous subdeacon was to be degraded to the rank of Doorwarden, or of Reader, but not to be allowed to read the Epistle or Gospel: which seems to mean that to read those was the function of the Reader who had not broken the Church's laws.

Hence we see that in the Primitive Church, using this phrase in the most restricted sense in which the sixteenth century reformers used it, it was not the custom for the celebrant to read either the Liturgical Epistle or Gospel, but this duty was performed by a clerk in the minor order of Reader. And we are particularly exhorted by the Homilies to follow the usages of the good fathers in the Primitive Church.

In 572 there was a Council held at Braga in Spain wherein it was determined, amongst other matters, that no one should read lessons or sing psalms from the ambo or reading-desk unless he had been ordained reader by the bishop.[1] And in the second half of the next century we find a similar prohibition in the Penitential of Theodore,[2] archbishop of Canterbury:

> A layman may not read the lesson in churches, nor sing the *Alleluia*, but only psalms, and responds without *Alleluia*.

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[1] Gratian, *Decreti* pars I: distinct. 92: can. iii.

[2] Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, Oxford, 1871; iii., 191.

In the eighth century, in England, the subdeacon had acquired the right to read the Epistle, and that duty is appointed him in the Pontifical known as that of Egbert[1] of York. And the Council of Reims in 813, in its fourth canon, states that it is the business of the subdeacon to read the Epistle. But a few years later Amalar of Metz[2] expresses his astonishment at subdeacons being allowed so to do, since this is not found to be part of the duties committed to him at his ordination, nor enjoined by canonical regulations, nor is it what his name implies. He is followed by the Micrologus[3] in the eleventh and Durandus[4] in the thirteenth century, both of whom think that subdeacons read the Epistle by tolerance rather than of right.

But while the deacon was appropriating to himself the reader's right of reading the Liturgical Gospel, and the subdeacon that of reading the Liturgical Epistle, the former was enabled by the peculiar dignity of the Gospel, as being the words of our Lord, to make its reading the privilege of his order to the exclusion of all those beneath him. Not so the subdeacon. During the seventh century we find that presbyters in charge of churches have clerks as their assistants,[5] but not until two centuries later do we learn definitely what duties were assigned to them. Pope Leo IV then directed[6] that they should read the Epistle or Lesson, make the responses at Mass, and

[1] Surtees Society, vol. xxvii., 1853; p. 10. Although known by the name of Egbert, the MS. copy which we now have, was written about two centuries later than when he lived.

[2] *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, Lib. II.: cap. xi.: miror . . . ut subdiaconus frequentissime legat lectionem ad missam. . . .

[3] *De Missa rite celebranda*, cap. viii.

[4] *De Divinis Officiis*, Lib. II: cap. viii: n. iv.

[5] Ninth Council of Toledo, c. 3: Council of Merida, c. 18. In England in 975, by the Laws of Edgar, every priest had to have his clerk.

[6] Migne, *Patr. Lat.*; t. cxv, col. 677.

sing the Psalms, that is, at divine service. And amongst the Articles of Enquiry for Rural Deans in the Diocese of Reims,[1] issued by Hincmar in 878, we find the question:—

> Whether the presbyter has a clerk, who can keep school, or read the Epistle, or is able to sing as far as may seem needful to him?

Thus we find that as early as we hear anything about the duties of the parish clerk, he has to be able to do three things: keep the parish school, read the Liturgical Epistle, and sing the Psalms in Divine Service. And, looking backwards, we can see the reason of the prohibitions of the Council of Braga and the Penitential of Theodore; which safeguard the rights of the minor clerks against the encroachments of the layman pure and simple.

When Gregory IX made his great collection of texts and published them as his Decretals in 1230, he embodied in it a canon of the Council of Nantes (some have referred it to Mâcon), which settled definitely that every presbyter who has charge of a parish should have a clerk, who should sing with him, and read the Epistle and Lesson; and who should be able to keep school and admonish the parishioners to send their children to church to learn the faith.[2]

As this was thus made part of the common law of the Church, it was binding on that portion of it which lay in the realm of England. The opinion of William Lindewode,[3] Official Principal of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as found in his glozes on the

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[1] Migne, *Patr. Lat.*; t. cxxv, col. 779.

[2] *Decr.* Greg. IX; Lib. III: tit. i: cap. iii.

[3] W. Lindewode, *Provinciale*, Lib. III: tit. *De concessione prebende*: cap. *A nostris maioribus*: verb. *Clericis.*

Provincial Constitutions of the archbishops, without doubt expresses the view of the law that would prevail in the Court over which he presided. In commenting on part of a constitution attributed to Boniface (though by some books to Winchelsey), he says:—

> *Clerks.*—Not, therefore, laymen. And you may understand that as regards this [benefice of *Aquae baiulus* or holy-water bearer], he is a layman who is not ordained, even though otherwise of competent literary ability (Gratiani *Decr.*, II: caus. xii: quaest. i: cap. vii, *Duo sunt genera Christianorum*, and Greg. IX, *Decr*, Lib. I: tit. xiv: cap. xi). Even if he has been twice married, although he was ordained before, yet he must be counted among laymen, because such a one is deprived of all clerical privilege (Sexti *Decr.*, Lib. I: tit. xii: cap. i). If, however, he were married, albeit not twice, yet so long as he wears the clerical habit and tonsure, he shall be held as a clerk in two respects: to wit, that he may enjoy the clerical privilege in his person, according to Gratiani *Decr.*, II: causa xvii: quaest. iv: cap. xxix., *Si quis suadente diabolo*; and that he may not be brought before the secular judge (Sexti *Decr.*, Lib. III: tit. ii: cap. i). But in all other respects he shall be considered as a layman. For the reason why that which is granted in the one case is refused in the other, see Gratiani *Decr.*, I: dist. xxv: cap. iv, *qualis hinc quisque egreditur:* and on account of that, Francis de Zabarellis, Cardinal of Padua, says that married clerks shall stand in church amongst the laymen and not amongst the clerks. [Then follow references to John Andreas and Peter de Anchorano.]
>
> Whence it appears, from what has been said above, that this office, of which he [Boniface] here speaks, ought not to be conferred on a married clerk. For this clerk has to wait on the priest at the altar, to sing with him, and to read the Epistle (Greg. IX, *Decr.*, Lib. III: tit. i: cap. iii). But, as I said, a married clerk will neither stand nor sit amongst the clergy but amongst

the laymen. Therefore, &c. Nevertheless, I think that in default of unmarried clerks, married clerks may well be admitted to such an office, so long as they have not been twice married, and wear the clerical habit and tonsure (harangue *ad hoc*, on Greg. IX, *Decr.*, Lib. III: tit. xxxvi: cap. v; Gratiani *Decr.*, I: dist. xxviii: cap. xiii; Greg. IX, *Decr.*, Lib. III: tit. iii: cap. vii). Nor does what has been alleged above contradict this, for in this case necessity excuses it, specially since custom supports it, according to what has been noted by Innocent IV in his gloze on the said chapter [3] of Greg. IX, *Decr.*, Lib. III: tit. i, *De vita et honestate clericorum.*

Notice that Lindewode says that it was customary for married parish clerks to read the Epistle. In actual practice the majority of parish clerks in England were married, and one frequently finds mention of the parish clerk's wife. John of Athon, writing between 1333 and 1348, in commenting on the word *obedience* in a constitution of Othobon, tells the following story which shows that in his day, too, parish clerks read the Liturgical Epistle:—

> Lately, when two clerks were contending about the carrying of holy water, the clerk appointed by the parishioners against the command of the priest, wrenched the book from the hands of the clerk who had been appointed by the rector, and who had been ordered to read the Epistle by the priest, and hurled him violently to the ground, drawing blood.[1]

John of Athon then discusses the interesting questions arising from the case, but the part that interests us most is his dictum, "that the appointment of this clerk, as of the other ministers of the church ought to be at the disposal of the rector, and in no case of the parishioners."

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[1] John of Athon, *Constit. Dom. Othoboni*, tit. *De residentia archipresb. et episc.*: cap. *Pastor bonus*: verb. *Sancte obedientie.*

Another case that may be quoted as shewing actual practice, is that of the Vicar of Elmsted, who, in 1411, had to find a clerk to help him at private masses on week-days and to read the Epistle on holy days. Reading the Epistle formed part of the duties of the second clerk at Holy Trinity, Coventry, in 1462; of the clerk of St. Nicholas, Bristol, in 1481; and the clerk of Faversham, Kent, in 1506.

In the middle of the twelfth century they do not seem to have been so particular as they were in Lindewode's time, or, at least, as he says they ought to be. In the "Life of St. Godric" we are told[1] that one first of August, which happened to be a Sunday, the saint made a young man read the Epistle, who afterwards turned out to be a clerk, although he neither was dressed in clerical costume, nor wore the tonsure, and devoted himself to military pursuits.

On the continent we find the same practice, although John Beleth[2] and Durandus[3] advocated that the celebrant rather than the collet should read the Epistle. But at the Coronation Mass of Pope Nicholas V in 1477 the Epistle was read by one of the Counts in Latin and by another in Greek.[4] The state of practice in the first half of the fifteenth century may be gathered from the gloze of Nicholas de Tudeschis, called Panormitan, on the text *Ut quisque* which we have quoted above.

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[1] *Libellus de Vita et Miraculis S. Godrici*, Surtees Society, 1847; pp. 226-7.

[2] *Divinorum Officiorum brevis Explicatio*, cap. xxxviii.

[3] *Rationale Div. Off.*, Lib. IV: cap. xvi: n. vii.

[4] E. Martène, *De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus;* Lib. I: cap. iv: § vi: Antverpiæ, 1736; t. i, col. 374.

Item.—Note that in a parish church there ought to be at least one clerk besides the priest, and Paulus de Eleazaris says, in his commentary on the *Clementine Constitutions*, Lib. III: tit. x: cap. i, *Ne in agro*, that the intention of the law is that this clerk should have a title there, although the contrary is the actual practice. He brings forward in support of this Greg. IX, *Decr.*, Lib. III: tit. xxxviii: cap. xxx, *Postulasti*, and Lib. I: tit. xvii: cap. vi, *Proposuit*, concerning the matters with which the office of this clerk has to do.

Item.—Note that a presbyter ought not to say Mass without a clerk. See good texts in this same chapter, *Proposuit*, and Gratian's *Decretum*, III. *De Cons.*: distinct. i: cap. lxi, *Hoc quoque statutum est.* . . . If he cannot conveniently have a priest, let him have a deacon (Gratiani *Decretum*, I: distinct. xxiv: cap. iii, *Presbyteri, Diaconi*). But if he cannot have a deacon, let him have a clerk in a lesser order, as here. For less suffices a presbyter and a server or clerk, than two presbyters: see a good gloze in the foresaid Clementine *Ne in agro*, § *ad haec.* Nor would he sin if on account of poverty he had no clerk (harangue to *Decret.* Greg. IX, Lib. III: tit. xlviii: cap. iv, *De his qui*); in which case he may lawfully allow the people to help him (harangue to *Non liceat*, joined to the gloze on *Decret.* Gratiani, I: distinct. xcii): and so modify the gloze on distinct. xxxviii: cap. xii, *Sedulo monendi*, which says that it is not enough that the people answer *Amen.*

¶ In the third gloze on distinct. lxix: cap. i, *quoniam videmus*, the intention of the commentator is to allege that text which says that he who is not a subdeacon ought not to read the Epistle from the pulpit (or ambo). Conclude from this, that one who is not ordained to the subdiaconate, cannot, when doing duty as a subdeacon, either read the Epistle from the pulpit or wear the sacred vestments (distinct xcii: cap. iii, *Non liceat in pulpito*): otherwise he would sin gravely and should be punished in accordance with the provisions of *Decret.* Greg. IX, Lib. V: tit. xxviii: capp. i, et ii; since he

cannot be promoted to the subdiaconate without a dispensation. For what is referred to in the said chapters i and ii it seems indeed that a papal dispensation is required, as is hinted at in the gloze on the same. But note that in actual practice the contrary takes place. So, therefore, even a layman can read the Epistle in cases of necessity, though not from the pulpit, nor wearing the sacred vestments.[1]

We learn from this that the parish priests ought to have a clerk who can read the Epistle: but that often the reader of the Epistle was only a mere layman without any pretence to orders of any sort. Moreover, if the parish-priest directed the layman or clerk to put on the vestments of a subdeacon and read the Epistle from the pulpit or ambo, he would thereby be making him a subdeacon: which he ought not to do, according to the canonists, unless he has a papal dispensation. But we will return to the question of what differentiates a clerk from a layman later on.

We see that up to 1549 it was the common practice in England (and elsewhere) for the Epistle to be read by a man who was either a married clerk, and little different from a layman, or else a layman pure and simple.

On 9 June, 1549, an Act of Parliament enforced on the Church of England a Book of Common Prayer, which contained the Mass in English. Its sponsors affirmed[2] that it had been "brought to the very use as Christ left it, as the apostles used it, as the holy Fathers delivered it," and that it had been composed "through the aid of the Holy Ghost."

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[1] *Lectura* domini Nicholai abbatis Siculi *super tertio libro Decretalium*, Impressa Basilee per magistrum Joannem de Amerbach, 1489; Signat. A 4, et *verso*.

[2] John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of the Church*, London, 1583; p. 1306. *Grafton's Chronicle*, London, 1809; vol. ii, p. 517.

Of the truth of this statement we will say nothing; but merely point out how this description of Edward's First Prayer Book completely fulfils the requirements of the passage from the Homily which we quoted at the commencement of this essay. Now the direction for reading the Epistle in this book[1] is as follows:—

> The Collectes ended, the priest, or he that is appointed, shall reade the Epistle, in a place assigned for the purpose.

Nor are we left in any doubt as to who is included under the phrase "he that is appointed," for in the Psalter published by Grafton in 1549, and now being edited for the Henry Bradshaw Society, by Dr. J. Wickham Legg, the Epistle is one of the things that appertain to the clerk to say at the ministration of the Communion. And the "place assigned for the purpose" by the injunctions[2] of 1547, [which, though hardly of legal force, yet sufficiently express the opinion of those in authority in the reign of Edward VI] was "the pulpit, or such convenient place as people may hear."

Hence we may justly conclude that, in the opinion of the reformers of the middle of the sixteenth century, the clerk was a suitable person to read the Liturgical Epistle; that he could read it from the pulpit, or other convenient place determined by the structure of the church; and that all of these things were in accordance with the mind of the Primitive Church, which they always held up as their model.

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[1] *The First Prayer Book of King Edward VI*, being Vol. II of the Library of Liturgiology and Ecclesiology for English Readers, edited by Vernon Staley, The De La More Press, 1903; p. 270.

[2] T. Cranmer, *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters*, Parker Society, 1846; p. 501.

The First Prayer Book, as its sponsors continually assure us, is "agreeable to the Word of God and the Primitive Church." Yet it came to pass that in spite of the possession of such desirable qualities, the First Book soon gave way to the Second. We are told by the Act of Parliament, 5 & 6 Ed. VI, cap. i, § 5; that the Second Prayer Book is the First "explained and made fully perfect." In this book the corresponding rubric[1] to that which we have just quoted from its predecessor runs:—

> Immediately after the Collects, the Priest shall read the Epistle,

which at first sight seems to put a stop to the practice that prevailed under the First Book, that of the clerk reading the Epistle.

Such is not necessarily the case, however. But we may defer the consideration of this rubric, first, because the Second Book was hardly used at all, and secondly, because, the rubric being the same as in the Prayer Book of Elizabeth, most of the arguments will apply equally to that of Edward, and it is more profitable to discuss the rubric of what was a living rite than that of one which has only an antiquarian interest to us at the present day.

On the Feast of the Nativity of St. John Baptist, 1559, the Latin Mass was again replaced by one in the English tongue, and again by Act of Parliament only. And there[2] the rubric runs:—

> Immediately after the Collects, the priest shall read the Epistle.

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[1] *The Two Liturgies . . . of Edward VI*, Parker Society, 1844; p. 268.
[2] *Liturgies . . . of Queen Elizabeth*, Parker Society, 1847; p. 183.

This seems plain enough. Yet is quite certain that "shall" does not mean "must," and that the rubric can only mean that the priest shall read it when he has no assistant to read it for him. For the next rubric is:—

> And the Epistle ended, he shall say the Gospel.

This, too, seems plainly to state that the priest, and none other, shall read the Liturgical Gospel. But in *The form and manner of ordering of deacons* in the same book the bishop gives each deacon "authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God, and to preach the same if" he "be thereunto ordinarily commanded," and to put the matter beyond doubt, the rubric definitely directs[1] that:—

> Then one of them appointed by the bishop shall read the Gospel of that day.

In 1564 Parker put forth some injunctions, commonly known as the Elizabethan Advertisements, with a view to imposing the elements of ceremonial decency upon the nonconformist and puritan party. There we find mention of the Epistoler and Gospeller, vested in copes, at the celebration of the Eucharist in cathedral and collegiate churches. And we find them existing actually on numerous occasions during the reign of Elizabeth.

We see, therefore, that the rubric allows of other ministers than the celebrant to read both the Epistle and the Gospel, and that the Gospeller was often a deacon and not a priest. As it had hitherto been the universal custom of the church that the Gospel should

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[1] *Ibid.*, 283.

be read by a minister of higher order (whether actual or functional) than the reader of the Epistle, this of itself would throw doubt on the apparent restriction of the latter to the order of presbyter. Fortunately we are again left in no doubt on the matter.

In 1571 Grindal instituted a metropolitical visitation of his province of York, and amongst the injunctions for the laity is one concerning the parish clerk:—

> That no parish clerk be appointed against the goodwill, or without the consent of the parson, vicar, or curate in any parish, and that he be obedient to the parson, vicar and curate, specially in the time of celebration of divine service or of sacraments, or in any preparation thereunto; and that he be able also to read the first lesson, the Epistle, and the psalms, with answers to the suffrages, as is used; . . . . and also that he endeavour himself to teach young children to read, if he be able so to do.[1]

In 1576, having been translated to Canterbury, he began a similar Visitation to the Southern Province, but was sequestrated before he got very far. There he enquired:—

> Whether the parish clerk be appointed to the ancient custom of the parish; and whether he be not obedient to the parson, vicar, or curate, specially in the time of divine service, or of the sacraments, or in any preparation thereunto; and whether he be able and ready to read the first lesson, the Epistle, and the psalms, with answers to the suffrages as is used.[2]

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[1] Edm. Grindal, *Remains*, Parker Society, 1843; p. 142.

[2] *Ibid.*, 168. Grindal's sequestration arose from causes not all of which are to his discredit. One was his refusal to carry out the principles of so many of the Reformers, by allowing Dr. Julio Borgaruccio to marry another man's wife. It required some courage to do this, for Julio was physician to the Royal Favourite, Leicester, having received the appointment, so report said, for his skill in poisoning.

Exactly the same question is found in the Visitation Articles[1] put forth by John Aylmer, Bishop of London, in 1577; and in those of the Bishop of Lincoln, in 1585 and 1588. But in 1598 the Bishop of Lincoln[2] enquired whether the parish clerk was "suffered to read anything in the church, save the one lesson, and the Epistle."

Consequently, we see that, in spite of the wording of the rubrics, neither Epistle nor Gospel was necessarily read by the officiating priest; and further, that the readers of both were not even necessarily in the order of presbyter, but the gospeller was often only in the order of deacon, and the epistoler more usually the parish clerk. Moreover, Grindal and others are manifestly perpetuating an old practice, and not innovating, in this matter of the parish clerk's reading the Epistle: "As is used," they say. So that we may take it that there had been no breach with the past centuries in this respect up to the end of the reign of Elizabeth. Grindal's injunction at York is, indeed, almost the same as Hincmar's at Reims in 878: reading the Epistle, singing the psalms, and keeping school are the chief duties of the clerk in both.

In Andrews' days[3] the epistoler was seldom a priest, even in cathedral churches: but we find that bishops cease to enquire whether the parish clerk reads the Epistle. The clerks appear to have taken too much upon themselves in some places. Thus Andrews enquires in 1619, in his diocese of Winchester,[4] whether the parish clerk doth "meddle with anything above

[1] *Royal Commission on Ritual*, 2nd Rep., 1868; p. 420.
[2] Lincoln Visitation Articles for 1585, 1588, and 1598; in the British Museum.
[3] John Cosin, *Works*, Oxford, 1855; vol. v, p. 90.
[4] Ritual Commission, *2nd Rep.*, 495. And similarly in numerous other Visitation Articles.

his office, as to church women, read prayers, bury the dead, or such like?" In practice the epistoler and gospeller were often lay clerks in cathedral churches. In 1641, the dean and chapter of Worcester[1] reported to Parliament that "the epistoler and gospeller are not by statutes to be priests, but lay clerks as in other churches": and in a catalogue[2] of every particular member of the Church of Worcester, Humphrey Withie is put down as the first of the quire men, then as "deacon or gospeller," and again later on as one of the two vergers. The last of the quire men is John Laight, who figures further down as "subdeacon or epistoler." Against this it has been alleged that the titles of offices have often persisted, although the holders thereof have long ceased to perform the functions denoted by their titles. It is, however, never a safe thing to argue from the general to the particular on such slender grounds. And that there is no reason to disbelieve that in the Worcester case the holders of those titles really performed the offices thereby denoted, may be gathered from the fact that in another church, that of Winchester, Laud found this same practice in vogue when he visited it metropolitically in 1635. He thought fit to enjoin that none of the quire men of Winchester should presume to read Epistles or the Gospel, unless they had been previously promoted to Holy Orders, and that henceforward the said Epistles and Gospel should be read at the Holy Eucharistic Table.[3] In the then state of the church in England, Laud was no doubt satisfied that it was necessary to repress the intrusion of lay clerks, and parish clerks, into spheres that did not belong to them,

[1] J. Noake, *The Monastery and Cathedral of Worcester*, 1866; p. 559.

[2] Ibid, 568.

[3] William Laud, *Works*, Oxford, 1853; vol. v, p. 478.

even to the extent of depriving them, at any rate for the time, of duties that were theirs by canon law. Davenant, archdeacon of Berkshire, enquired in 1631 whether the parish clerk read any part of divine service except the first lesson: but he makes no mention of the Eucharist while treating of the parish clerk. It may be remembered in this connection that singing the psalms, reading the first lesson, and leading the people's responses were among the duties of the clerk in Elizabeth's time.

In 1772 the duties of the parish clerk[1] were defined to lie chiefly in "responses to the minister, reading lessons, singing psalms, etc." But nothing is said about reading the Epistle. However, at Merton College, Oxford,[2] it was the custom about the middle of the nineteenth century, if there were but one priest at the altar, for one of the scholars to read the Epistle from the lowest chancel step, on the south side. As the late Dr. Temple said, "the silence of history is but a weak foundation for a negative opinion."

At Keighley, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, it was the custom within living memory for the parish clerk to wear a black gown and bands and to read the first lesson and the Epistle. To do the latter he left his seat, went up within the rails, took the book from the altar, read the Epistle facing west, replaced the book and returned to his seat.[3]

There has been no alteration of the rubric directing the reading of the Epistle since 1552, beyond the change from "Collects" to "Collect" made in 1661; nor has there been any change of the law of the Church as laid down in the Decretal of Gregory IX, giving

[1] Giles Jacob, *New Law Dictionary*, London, 1772; s. v. *Parish clerks.*
[2] Letter signed "Mertonensis" in *Church Times*, 30th March 1899.
[3] From a private letter to the Secretary of the Alcuin Club.

to the parish clerk the right of reading the Epistle at celebrations of the Holy Eucharist. There has, however, been a disuse, or rather, non-use of the practice for some time in England, at any rate to a large extent. But non-use for a time does not abrogate, specially as the Decretal has been invigorated with the force of Statute Law by 25 Hen. VIII, cap. xix: § viii; and therefore, until a canon is passed by Convocation and given the Royal License, prohibiting the parish clerk from singing the psalms and reading the Liturgical Epistle, this Decretal remains in force.

On the Continent the same practice has always obtained. The directions for celebrating mass prefixed to the Pian Roman Massbook specially retain the right of reading the Epistle for clerks in minor orders.

Whenever the celebrant sings mass without deacon and subdeacon, some reader vested in a surplice sings the Epistle in the accustomed place, but does not kiss the celebrant's hands at the end; the celebrant, however, himself sings the Gospel at the Gospel-corner. Merati, sometime Consultor of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, observes on this:[1] "towards the end of the last orison, the first collet takes the book from the credence and sings the Epistle."

Dom Claude de Vert tells us that in country parishes in France, and even in the poorer parishes in towns where there were no deacons or subdeacons, the curate caused the Epistle to be read by the schoolmaster, or clerk, or even by a choirboy if he was able to read it.[2] In the Paris Ceremonials of 1703 and 1711 at a Sung Mass without Ministers in Holy Order the

[1] B. Gavanti and C. M. Merati, *Thesaurus Sacrorum Rituum*, Venetiis, 1788; t. i, p. 252, 253.

[2] *Explication de la Messe*, Paris, 1706; vol. iv, p. 62, *note*.

thurifer is directed to read the Epistle; and in the edition of 1843 the permission was extended even to a choirboy. De Moleon[1] noticed that a Reader in alb or surplice read the Epistle in Paris when there was no deacon at High Mass. And at St. John, Lyons, the lessons at Tenebrae, and the prophetical lessons on Easter Even at the Mass, were chanted by choirboys who wore fanons *(manipules)*.

In the diocese of Blois, as well as in several others, there flourished a custom in churches where deacon and subdeacon were lacking to vest two laymen, either youths or married, in albs, and tunicle or dalmatic (but without stole or fanons), and let them seem to perform the office of deacon and subdeacon respectively at the High Mass, though they only assisted the celebrant and did not perform any function belonging to those sacred orders, whatever that may mean. But whatever it was, the Congregation forbade it[2] by a decree dated 11th September 1847. However, for High Mass, when necessary, a clerk can be authorised to read the Epistle vested in a tunicle, but without a fanon, according to two decrees[3] of the same Congregation of Sacred Rites dated 18th December 1784, and 22nd July 1849, respectively. For *missa cantata* without ministers Le Vavasseur[4] directs one of the two collets to read the Epistle, without determining which; but in a note he states that Merati, Bauldry, and Castaldi say the first, while Baldeschi says the second, which he considers more natural. Pio Martinucci[5] agrees with Merati.

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[1] *Voyages Liturgiques*, Paris, 1757; pp. 246-63.
[2] Quoted by Le Vavasseur, *Cérémonial selon le rit romain*, Paris, 1857; pp. 281-2.
[3] *Ibid*, 282.
[4] *Ibid*, 285.
[5] *Manuale SS. Caeremoniarum*, Romæ, 1878; pt. i: lib. i: cap. xvi.

We see, therefore, that both in England and on the Continent, in the west of Europe, it has pertained to a clerk in minor orders to read the Liturgical Epistle since the time when he first comes into view in the pages of history. So far from being a minor local usage, it is primitive, widespread, and recognised by authority.

Some people speak of the parish clerk as though he were a layman. As in so many, if not all, controversies, everything depends on the definition of the terms used. If by "layman" is meant every man not in the orders of deacon, presbyter, or bishop, then, of course, they are correct in describing the clerk as a layman. And this view would seem to be that of the civil lawyers. But up to the end of the middle ages in England, as elsewhere, the minor orders from the subdiaconate down to the singership and doorwardenship were included in the ranks of the clergy, and were thus entitled to the same clerical privileges and disabilities as the Holy Orders. Was, and is, the parish clerk a clerk in the sense used by Lindewode and Gregory IX? or is he a layman pure and simple, as some people contend?

At the present time the power of conferring the two holy orders, viz., the diaconate and the priesthood, (including under the latter term the two hierarchical orders of the presbyterate and the episcopate), is restricted entirely to the episcopate; and they are bestowed, after general fasting[1] and collective prayer, by the laying on of hands. But for the anhierarchical or minor orders, from the subdiaconate downwards, there was, and is, in the Western Church, no laying

[1] With us the Embertide fast precedes every ordination to the diaconate and presbyterate.

on of hands, nor is the bishop their sole and essential minister.[1] A singer can be ordained by any parish priest, without any reference whatever to the bishop.[2] Perhaps the majority of canonists are agreed that a presbyter can confer all other minor orders, including the subdiaconate, and some go so far as to maintain that, if properly authorised, he can confer the diaconate as well. In reality, a priest who appoints a man to serve him at the holy Eucharist, makes him at least a subdeacon in function for the time; and this is authorised by the general custom of the Western Church.

The 91st canon of 1603 formally authorises the parish priest, or the minister for the time being, to choose a suitable man as parish clerk, which choice must be signified to the parishioners the next Sunday following, in the time of divine service.[3] But is a parish clerk so instituted *clericus* in the medieval sense, although deprived of his temporal privileges?

In the early Roman Church,[4] minor orders were conferred without any ceremony of ordination. Doorwardens, readers and exorcists were admitted to their order simply by verbal authorisation to exercise their office: and even collets and subdeacons were merely blessed at some mass at the time of Communion, and had the symbols of their office presented to them. The blessing, which was not an early feature, has no mention of the office or its duties.[5]

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[1] See also Martène *De antiq. eccl. rit.*, lib. I: cap. viii: art. xviii: n. xvii-xviii.

[2] Gratiani *Decreta*, pars I: distinct. xxiii: cap. xx, *Psalmista.*

[3] One may notice that the parish clerk must not be less than 20 years old. The same rule obtained for the subdiaconate (Gratiani *Decr.* I: distinct. lxxvii: cap. iv.)

[4] L. Duchesne, *Origines du culte Chrétien*, Paris, 1898; p. 339.

[5] J. Mabillon, *Museum Italicum*, Lutetiae Parisiorum, 1869; t. ii, p. 85.

All that is essential, then, for a valid and regular bestowal of minor orders, is that some authorised priest should choose the person to be ordained, ascertain that he is fit and suitable, and then by word of mouth authorise him to perform the duties of his order, and signify the same to the parish. This is precisely what is done in the institution of parish clerks according to the 91st canon of 1603. In the 17th century, there was, in addition to this, some ceremony of admission or approval by the bishop of the diocese or his chancellor.[1] Before the canon of 1603, the same practice obtained: the clerk was chosen by the minister, or with his consent and approval.

We see, therefore, that the parish clerk has always been a clerk and not a layman in the canonical sense, and that he has the right to read the Liturgical Epistle. Any objection to his being a clerk because he was not ordained with the more elaborate ceremonial of the later middle ages will tell equally against the validity of our Holy Orders, the forms for bestowing which have been considerably simplified since 1552, and brought to a more primitive form, which, nevertheless, has retained all the essentials as well of matter as of form, just as has our method of conferring the minor order of "clerk."

This simplification of rites and ceremonies is one with the spirit of the quotation from the homily with which we commenced:—

> Before all other things, this we must be sure of specially, that this supper be in such wise done and ministered as our Lord and Saviour did and commanded to be done, as his holy Apostles used it, *and the good Fathers in the Primitive Church frequented it.*

[1] Ritual Commission, *2nd Report*, pp. 489, 515, 520, 536, 546, 549, 553, 587. Hall of Exeter enquired if a surplice or rochet was provided for the clerk in 1638: and Cosin of Durham in 1662, a gown with a surplice over it.

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